

What is the purpose of Political Education?

The main purpose of political education is to prepare cadres who can do the work of the organisation. As soon as a leadership is formed it begins to deplete, because comrades are deployed to higher structures. Others move away. For these reasons the branch needs to generate a steady stream of new cadres who are ready to take up the leadership and administration of the branch.

When political education is carried out consistently, it also becomes a way of recruiting new members. Ordinary citizens may be persuaded to attend classes, even though they might not be ready to pay a membership fee and join the organisation.

At regular and frequent political education gatherings a lot of information can be announced about branch and other activities (e.g. BGMs, campaigns, events of fraternal organisations).

What form does Political Education take?

Because Political Education is intended to contribute to change in the world, it must take the form of a dialogue between people. The "bucket-and-tap" form of presentation, where students are buckets and the teacher is a tap, is no good for the purpose of Political Education.

Therefore the form of Political Education is as follows:

There is a short text. This is given so as to focus dialogue around a particular topic.

There is no lecturer. One of the students has the task of opening the discussion. For the remainder of the session (total time of the session is one and a half hours), the participants discuss.

There is a chairperson. The job of the chairperson is to encourage all participants to join in. The participants are supposed to become political cadres. Therefore they cannot afford to be shy when talking about politics, and still less so when they are safe among their own comrades. The chairperson encourages and protects them.

The process is almost completely self-sustaining. It requires next to no inputs from above: no funding, no prescription, no infrastructure, no supervision, no report-backs, no cost. It requires somebody to get some suitable texts and to distribute

them with invitations to attend at a venue and time, according to a schedule. The biggest difficulty is preparing and updating a database and communicating regularly with the people on the list (see below).

Texts

The question of what texts to put in front of a group is not the most critical one. The requirement is that the text must be sufficient to generate dialogue of a political nature between the participants. There must be no sense of indoctrination or drilling involved. There should probably be a good mixture in the first place between classic political texts, on the one hand, and current documents and even journalism. There should be no sense of sectarian division between the Alliance Partners.

Study groups in general, however, would always be well advised to devote an early session or two to the question of why they are there, and how they will work. For example, they could discuss this document. At a session early in their series they should probably discuss something like Chapter Two of Paulo Freire's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed". It is necessary that they apply their minds to what they are trying to achieve, and why.

The study group has no standing in the democracy of the organisation. It does not elect delegates or vote on motions. As a result it is free from any requirement of coming to decisions or conclusions. Therefore it is not concerned to arrive at any line, orthodox or otherwise. It opens up matters for discussion, bringing them to the attention of participants. It is the other, higher, structures of the organisation that will come to conclusions and make decisions for action.

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